

PROMOTING AAROM AQUATIC WORK IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY  
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

A Thesis submitted to the faculty at Stanbridge University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

by

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## Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read *Promoting AAROM Aquatic Work in Occupational Therapy through Social Media* by Martha Herrera, Maria Luong, Zsanielle Moncayo, and Arielle Zhu, and in my opinion, this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy at Stanbridge University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Annette Hatala', written over a horizontal line.

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## Abstract

Occupational therapists work with a variety of populations in various practice settings. One niche within this field is aquatic therapy, a treatment modality for individuals with complex neurological disorders with a goal to obtain maximal functional independence and enhance mobility (Marinho-Buzelli et al., 2014). The purpose of this study is to show occupational therapists how to promote their niche on social media and educate the public. For this study, WATSU® and aquatic unwinding are introduced as aquatic modalities in occupational therapy. Movements are performed through active assistive range of motion (AAROM), where the client voluntarily moves their affected extremity with the assistance of an external source to meet the client's full range of motion (Walter & Winston, 2018). A study was conducted by posting three Instagram videos of AAROM aquatic therapy modalities using different marketing strategies to assess our followers' engagement with the videos. By the end of our data collection, our sample size was thirty-four followers on our private Instagram account, 27 of them being occupational therapy students and 7 of them with no background in occupational therapy. Our results showed that our first video that did not utilize marketing strategies received 39 views and 8 likes. Our second video posted with hashtags received 49 views and 15 likes. Our last video that used hashtags and was shared through the researchers' personal Instagram accounts received 53 views and 11 likes. None of our videos received any comments. Due to our limitations, further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of utilizing marketing strategies through the use of a public Instagram account.

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## **Promoting AAROM Aquatic Modalities in Occupational Therapy through Social Media**

Occupational therapy (OT), according to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2012), is a client-centered health care profession that has a primary goal to enable people's participation in everyday life activities for the promotion of health. Occupational therapists work with diverse populations and practice areas, or niches. One OT niche is aquatic therapy, a treatment modality for patients with complex neurological disorders. It can also help patients with disabilities achieve maximal functional independence and improve their mobility (Marinho-Buzelli et al., 2014). Aquatic therapy can be performed using a type of movement known as active assistive range of motion (AAROM) to maintain or increase joint flexibility and range of motion. AAROM involves the client trying to voluntarily move an affected extremity with their own muscle strength, but with assistance of an external force to complete the full range of motion (Walter & Winston, 2018). This external force can be provided by the occupational therapist, the client's unaffected extremity, or a mechanical device. Within aquatic therapy, there are specific modalities including WATSU® and aquatic unwinding. WATSU® is a passive form of aquatic therapy that gently moves a person in warm water in graceful flowing movements while relieving compression forces in their joints (Schoedinger, n.d.). It assists with deep relaxation while calming the sympathetic nervous system and enhancing the parasympathetic nervous system (Schoedinger, n.d.). WATSU® has many benefits including decreasing muscle spasms, spasticity, and pain while increasing range of motion and muscle relaxation. This modality has shown improvements in individuals with disabilities including traumatic brain injury, spinal cord



injury, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease, stroke, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, arthritis, and more. Therapists believe that WATSU® has been very beneficial and effective for clients who struggle with their daily functioning due to pain, so this treatment is slowly being incorporated into hospitals, clinics, and rehab centers around the world (Schoedinger, n.d.). This demonstrates the significance of utilizing aquatic therapy and WATSU® as a treatment modality within OT.

In the United States, 7 out of 10 Americans use social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Some examples of social media are Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. Social media is used to increase communication with others, and this means healthcare professionals (HCPs) can utilize it to help communicate with patients (Hazzam & Lahrech, 2018). Social media allows one to market themselves and/or their company to the public. Currently, few occupational therapists use social media to promote their niches, such as AAROM aquatic therapy. While conducting our research, we noticed that occupational therapists were not mentioned among HCPs that utilize social media.

In 2007, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) created the *AOTA Centennial Vision*. This vision included a section on demonstrating occupational therapists' value and services to the public (AOTA, 2007). In 2017, the AOTA created *Vision 2025*, which adapted the centennial vision, and strongly emphasized advocacy and policy change as central principles of the profession. Our study will focus on promoting OT and its niches such as AAROM aquatic therapy that may not be as known within the field and the public. This study aligns with the *AOTA Centennial Vision* and *Vision 2025* as the purpose is to educate occupational therapists on the value and importance of social media while showing them which marketing strategies can be used to increase interaction

to best promote and advocate for OT. Based on the AOTA and the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (2011) in the *Occupational Therapy Research Agenda*, our study falls into the intervention and translational research areas because we are introducing a new intervention for occupational therapists to promote the field with the hope that social media will be adopted into practice.

We intend to share the benefits of social media use for HCPs and demonstrate how other HCPs are already utilizing these platforms. The benefits of social media can have an impact on the public's understanding of what OT niches look like. The purpose of this research is to inspire occupational therapists to effectively use social media as a tool for promotion of OT niches. We aim to share about AAROM aquatic therapy on social media as a way to educate other occupational therapists and the public about this niche.

### **Statement of Problem**

Social media offers users the ability to learn about and be exposed to new ideas, companies, etc. It is a tool occupational therapists can use to share about their niche practices. We noticed that occupational therapists were either not explicitly stated as HCPs that utilized social media and few occupational therapist federations had a social media coordinator (Hamilton et al., 2016). This led us to want to educate occupational therapists about social media and its benefits as we believe social media will allow more people to learn about OT and its niches.

## **Literature Review**

### **Argument About the Social Significance of the Topic**

Social media is primarily used by people 18-29 years old and those 65 years and older (Alshakhs & Alanzi, 2018). HCPs use these platforms to create a virtual community, connect with other HCPs, and share knowledge to educate others (Hazzam & Lahrech, 2018). Social media is shaping the way HCPs receive new information, which shapes how the public is receiving treatment. HCPs should utilize these platforms as a form of communication with their peers and patients. Social media is a tool that gives HCPs access to new information, making it a resource for education. While conducting research, we began to notice that various disciplines within the healthcare profession use social media, however research in OT is limited. We plan to provide evidence that social media can be beneficial for occupational therapists to utilize as a tool for promotion and education, for sharing knowledge with other HCPs, and as a resource for patients to access healthcare information.

### **Promotion and Education**

Alshakhs and Alanzi (2018) examined how HCPs in Saudi Arabia view social media from a health care delivery perspective. They had 120 HCPs, 45.9% being physicians and nurses, complete an online survey that was distributed over Twitter and WhatsApp. The results revealed that 78 participants (65%) used social media mainly for personal use, and only 11 participants (9.2%) used social media mainly for professional use. Out of the participants' responses, about 66% believed that they could use social media as a tool to enhance their professional knowledge, and 85% believed social media is a great way to provide patient education and promote public health (Alshakhs &

Alanzi, 2018). More than half (55.93%) of the participants displayed an interest in using social media for professional purposes (Alshakhs & Alanzi, 2018). In a similar study, Unnikrishnan et al. (2018) surveyed 183 HCPs to examine their pattern of social media use. Results revealed that 63.4% of participants used social media for research translation and 43.2% used it to obtain research evidence (Unnikrishnan et al., 2018). The preferred platform was YouTube (38.8%) followed closely by WhatsApp (38.3%). The majority of participants believed that using social media can help gain access to a vast amount of information in less time (Unnikrishnan et al., 2018). The fourth most common purpose of using social media among the participants (32.8%) was for health promotion and health education. These studies support the idea that occupational therapists can use social media to educate the public about the field, its benefits, and how it can be used in practice in a variety of ways, such as promoting niches like AAROM aquatic modalities.

### **Knowledge Sharing Among Professionals**

Alshakhs and Alanzi (2018) found that HCPs are using social media as a source for improving professionalism, sharing knowledge, and creating networks with other professionals. They concluded that respondents believed social media can provide HCPs with tools that assist in healthcare education, advice, and patient interaction. An exploratory study by Imran et al. (2019) involved semi-structured interviews with 15 doctors from differing healthcare institutions in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, to gather their experiences with using social media for knowledge sharing. They found common themes among the interviews and concluded that the participants utilized social media for both in-role and extra-role knowledge sharing (Imran et al., 2019). They defined in-role knowledge as knowledge that is required for their specific job, and extra-role knowledge

as learning what is beyond their job requirements and scope of practice. Hazzam and Lahrech (2018) found that HCPs are communicating continuously to improve their overall performance skills in their daily tasks. They mentioned that social media has been an effective communication tool for inclusion of stakeholders, exchange of medical information with peers, enhancement of productivity, and professional gain. In addition, social media provides timely responses, easy access, and navigation to enhance the knowledge of HCPs (Hazzam & Lahrech, 2018). All three of these studies established that using social media for online communication is effective, convenient, and can provide opportunities for HCPs to share and gain further knowledge. There should be more of a presence of OT on social media platforms to educate other health professionals on various niches in the field, such as AAROM aquatic therapy.

### **Patients' Use of Social Media**

Antheunis et al. (2013) examined how patients in the Netherlands used various social media platforms for health-related reasons. They found that Twitter (59.9%) was the most used social media platform among patients and that it was mainly used for gathering and exchanging information. Facebook came second (52.3%), and it was mainly used for social support and exchanging advice (Antheunis et al., 2013). In another study by Moon et al. (2019), they interviewed mothers of infants to see how they were using social media. Their findings revealed that mothers were using social media to gather and assess information from multiple perspectives to make decisions about their infants. The mothers also placed equal value on the information they found online with the advice they received from family and friends (Moon et al., 2019). These studies contribute to the understanding of how social media is being used by patients and

validates the importance of why occupational therapists should share accurate information on these platforms so patients can find what they need.

### **Remaining Gaps in Evidence**

Out of the studies we examined, only one included OT as a profession that utilizes social media. The various HCPs that were mentioned in the studies included physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, and other allied health personnel. Although occupational therapists may have fallen within the category of allied health personnel, the studies never explicitly specified this, so we cannot conclude that they were participants. Based on this evidence, we concluded that there is a lack of research on the professional use of social media by occupational therapists. With this information, we should encourage more occupational therapists to use social media platforms and marketing strategies for professional gain. Social media can help to educate the public about OT niches, such as AAROM aquatic therapy, and increase communication between occupational therapists and other HCPs.

### **Argument About the Clinical Significance of the Evidence**

There is strong evidence for social media being a form of communication, a tool for education, and a method of promotion. Hamilton et al. (2016) have pointed out that there were few OT organizations with a social media coordinator. The organizations that had a social media coordinator, or that attempted to use social media, had greater success in communicating with members and promoting their organization and profession (Hamilton et al., 2016). Hazzam and Lahrech (2018) showed that those who use social media for extended periods of time use it to improve interpersonal communication with other HCPs. Unnikrishnan et al. (2018), found that approximately half of the HCPs in

their study used social media as a way of gathering information. Not only do these studies show that social media can be beneficial among HCPs, but they suggest that a social media presence can also benefit their patients. Alshakhs and Alanzi (2018) found that the majority of their participants agreed that social media is an effective tool for patient education. Moon et al. (2019) also found that new mothers were using social media and other online sources, such as WebMD, to find answers to questions about their infants' health. Another study found that the majority of the participants used social media to increase their understanding of information, have better communication with their doctors, take care of their needs, and connect with others (Antheunis et al., 2013). Overall, the literature supports that social media is a tool HCPs can use to educate themselves and the public, and to increase their connections with other professionals. Occupational therapists can benefit from promoting their field on social media platforms, so the public can learn more about the practice and how it can benefit their lives.

### **Marketing Strategies**

We examined various social media marketing strategies and how they can be utilized for the promotion of OT niches. Purba et al. (2020) found that Instagram was the most popular platform for brand marketing and that social media marketing had a greater impact than traditional marketing. In addition, using social media as a marketing tool has brought a quicker rise in product and business visibility, allowing an increase of customers and potential partners. Social media has also shown deeper engagement and interest than their other counterparts. Furthermore, social media marketing was found to be more affordable than other advertising and promotional strategies. Within this research, Purba et al. (2020) discussed the importance of using hashtags to increase

engagement in Instagram posts. Hashtags are a useful and powerful tool that can help boost the visibility of a product. Instagram allows a maximum number of 30 hashtags per post, which many users take advantage of to gain more engagement. The researchers found that using a popular hashtag can make it difficult to find a new post due to the large volume of posts with the same hashtag. It is also important to use less popular and more specific hashtags to make it easier to find a post. In addition, Pophal (2022) states that using a generic hashtag can get you a potential broad and large audience, but she suggests that it is also important to focus on niche hashtags to target a specific audience.

During our research, we found occupational therapists on Instagram who also utilize hashtags to promote their specific practice. For example, Instagram user *gabriellatheot* (n.d), a pediatric occupational therapist who currently has over 11,000 followers, uses her account to share helpful resources, tips, tricks, and activity ideas to parents and clinicians across social media. Each of her posts include niche hashtags that relate to the content shown in that post. For example, in one post she shared a video of a toy kit for children called “Let’s Explore,” that addresses skills like executive functioning, bilateral coordination, fine motor strength and control, visual motor and visual perception skills, social interaction, imaginative play, and more (*gabriellatheot*, 2022). To promote this post, she used niche hashtags like *#letsexplore*, *#powerofplay*, *#finemotorfun*, *#imaginitiveplay*, *#feedingskills* and others related to the product, making it easy to find on the specific hashtag feed on Instagram. For this reason, occupational therapists should use hashtags in their social media posts related to their specific niche to gain more likes, followers, shares, and overall engagement, to increase awareness of the field of OT.



Wahid and Wadud (2020) conducted a study about social media marketing on Instagram. They wanted to analyze which day of the week and time of the day would be most effective in generating likes and comments on Instagram posts. They found that the content posted on weekdays had significantly more likes and comments compared to content posted on the weekend. They also found that posting during breakfast and lunch time also generated more engagement than during dinner time. Based on this study, HCPs should post their content on social media on weekday mornings or afternoons in order to get more engagement on their posts.

### **Statement of the Purpose, Hypothesis, and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to show occupational therapists the different types of social media marketing strategies that will help increase engagement of social media posts to promote their niches. In this study we created AAROM aquatic therapy demonstration videos that were posted on Instagram using different social media marketing strategies for the public and occupational therapists to view and compare how each strategy affects engagement. We hypothesized that using different marketing strategies when posting on Instagram would yield more engagement. We also hypothesized that we would recruit N=20 followers to our Instagram account. Participants were invited to follow our Instagram so they could have access to engage with our videos. The data we expected to gather will serve as evidence to share with occupational therapists to encourage them to use social media, if they do not already, and to use the marketing strategies shown in this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Person-Environment-Occupation model was developed in the 1990s as a way for the profession of OT to return to its roots in occupation. It is viewed as both a holistic and systems model and focuses on the interrelationships between the person and their roles, the context of their environment in which they live in, and the activities and occupations they perform and are a part of (Cole & Tufano, 2020). The interaction of these three components—person, environment, and occupations—results in one’s occupational performance, which is emphasized in this model.

When looking at the person component of this model, this encompasses all their physical, cognitive, and affective aspects (Cole & Tufano, 2020). Physical aspects include their strength, range of motion, energy, pain, flexibility, and endurance. The cognitive aspects include thinking, motor planning, reasoning, and others. Feelings, attitudes, motivation, relationships with others, and self-concept make up the affective component of the person.

According to this model, physical, cultural, social, and institutional elements make up the environment in which individuals perform their meaningful occupations (Cole & Tufano, 2020). The home, workplace, and the outdoors are part of the physical environment whereas family, friends, and community organizations are part of social environments. Cultural and social environments have some overlap, and include factors like religion, race, ethnicity, and politics. These environmental factors could serve as potential barriers but may also help to create opportunities for occupational engagement (Cole & Tufano, 2020).

Occupation is the last component of this model and serves as the foundation for OT. Occupations, according to AOTA (2020), are used therapeutically for enhancing and enabling participation of a person, group, or population in everyday life. There are various categories of occupation that are identified in the Fourth Edition of the “Occupational Therapy Practice Framework” (OTPF), which include activities of daily living such as bathing, toileting, dressing, feeding, sexual activity and instrumental activities of daily living which include things like caring for others, taking care of pets, community mobility, meal preparation, and shopping (AOTA, 2020). Other occupations identified in the OTPF include health management, rest and sleep, education, work, play, leisure, and social participation (AOTA, 2020). The person-environment-occupation model breaks down occupation into three levels—activity, task, and occupation. An activity is the basic unit of a task, a task is a component of an occupation, and an occupation is the task associated with the work and social roles of a person (Cole & Tufano, 2020).

The role of an occupational therapist is to enable their clients to engage in occupations that are meaningful for them (Cole & Tufano, 2020). Occupational therapists maintain a client-centered approach by having clients select their chosen occupations for intervention while also making an effort to recognize the relationship between the three components of the person-environment-occupation model. The collaboration between occupational therapists and their clients is necessary when developing goals, as this ensures that they align with their clients’ priorities and needs.

Occupational therapists can use this model when thinking about and developing their own professional goals. The purpose of this thesis is to educate occupational

therapists and demonstrate how to use social media to advocate for the profession of OT while also promoting their specific niche. By creating niche AAROM aquatic therapy specific videos and posting them to Instagram, while utilizing specific social media marketing strategies, it serves as a demonstration for others in the field to do the same. Using this model, we are able to tie these three components into our thesis. The “person” or people we are targeting are occupational therapists; the “environment” is the virtual context of social media, specifically Instagram; and the “occupation” is marketing the profession of OT and specific niches within the field. Occupational therapists can utilize social media for professional gain by educating and recruiting clients and promoting their specific niche. Because we shared these demonstration videos to others who are not in the OT community, we can also use this model and apply it to the public (person), who use social media (environment), for personal use and educational purposes (occupation).

## **Methodology**

### **Recruitment of Practitioners**

In this study, our goal was to recruit aquatic practitioners to demonstrate various AAROM aquatic modalities with human body models, also known as floaters. We attempted to recruit our practitioners through three online avenues: watsu.com, aquatic hub, and CommunOT, by posting an advertisement giving detailed information about our study and how to contact us if they want to be involved. Inclusion criteria for our practitioners was that they must have had at least a thousand hours of experience in their specific aquatic modality. They would have had the choice to send in their own demonstration videos or choose to be filmed by the researchers at a pool located in Huntington Beach, California. Once they had decided how they would like to be a part of

our project, they would have had to sign a video release form, giving us permission to post their video on the Instagram platform. In addition, the floaters that would have been in the videos would have also had to sign a video release form. Exclusion criteria for the floaters included being under eighteen years old, and being a client of the practitioner, as we could not show any real client sessions.

Although we attempted to recruit practitioners on those three avenues, we were not able to get any responses, due to the time constraint of having to film our videos and post them within the same week. For this reason, our thesis advisor Dr. Annette Hatala volunteered to be the practitioner performing the AAROM aquatic therapy modalities. She has been practicing OT since 2006 and has experience working with children and adults with physical disabilities, as well as within the mental health space. She also specializes in WATSU® aquatic therapy and horticulture. As we were unable to recruit floaters due to the time constraint, we volunteered ourselves to be recorded and signed the video release forms.

### **Video Demonstrations**

In this study, we recorded, edited, and posted three videos of AAROM aquatic therapy modalities to Instagram. No real clients or patients were included in these videos, as the researchers of this thesis study volunteered and gave consent to be the floaters in the demonstrations. The content of these videos was for educational purposes only and were not used to promote the practitioner demonstrating the modalities. These videos were only used to promote the specific AAROM aquatic therapy modalities being used. They also served as a way to show occupational therapists how they can post on their social media accounts and promote their specific niche. The modality demonstrations

were recorded from both above water and underwater perspectives. The above water videos were filmed on an iPhone 13 Pro, and the underwater videos were filmed with an iPhone 7 inside of a Sealife's SportDiver underwater smartphone housing unit.

The aquatic modality that was demonstrated in the video posted in week one was aquatic unwinding. This video was 49 seconds in length and did not include any voice audio. The song that was selected from Instagram's music library to play in the background was called "Vibez (Instrumental)" by Prod. Dior (2020). During this video, the practitioner was seated at the steps of the pool while manipulating the floaters hips with her feet and supporting her neck and shoulders with her arms and hands. In the video, the floater had aquatic cuffs wrapped around her thighs and legs just below the knee and had a pillow leg float under her knees to support the legs and keep them afloat. The caption of this video read:

AAROM modality: Aquatic Unwinding. Description: It is inviting the body to release short or long-term holding patterns which could have manifested physically, psychologically, and mentally. While conscious or unconscious, the holding patterns transitioned from a temporary coping mechanism into short or long-term holding patterns which have affected the participants' underlying occupations in various contexts. The practitioner is Dr. Annette Hatala, and she is located in Huntington Beach, CA.

The aquatic modality that was demonstrated in the video posted in week two was WATSU®. This video was 52 seconds in length and did not include any voice audio. The song that was selected to play in the background was called "Flow" by Jeff Kaale (2021). During this video, the practitioner was standing in the center of the pool while cradling

the floater upright using one arm to support the shoulders and neck and the other to support the legs. The caption of this video read:

AAROM Modality: Watsu. Description: One of the first aquatic modalities to use AAROM. The practitioner uses body drag, extension and flexion to increase overall range of motion in order to improve performance with activities of daily living. Water temperature is between 92-96 degrees which causes the body to relax into the moves. The practitioner is Dr. Annette Hatala, and she is located in Huntington Beach, CA.

The aquatic modality that was demonstrated in the video posted in week three was also WATSU®. This video was 59 seconds in length and did not include any voice audio. The song that was selected to play in the background was called “Feel Good” by Tundra Beats (2022). During this video, the practitioner was positioned behind the floater and utilized the wall of the pool to push the floater's legs and hips into their chest and get them into a tightened position. The practitioner's arms were then wrapped around the floater's legs while moving them through the water. The floater had aquatic cuffs wrapped around her legs just below the knees for additional support in the water. The caption of this video was the same as in week two.

### **Social Media Platform Chosen**

We chose to use Instagram for our social media platform based on the research we found and having previous experience using the app. In order to avoid bias, these video demonstrations were posted on a new Instagram account that was created for the purposes of this study. We chose @aquatictherapyot for our Instagram account name. This Instagram account was intended to be a business account, because it offers

additional features that private accounts do not have, however because our account needed to be private for gathering consent of participants, we had to set it up as a personal account. Each video was shared to our account as a reel rather than a video post, because reels allow you to see the number of views a video receives. All videos were edited within the Instagram application for convenience, as it made it easier to save the video as a draft and then come back to it when it needed to be posted.

### **Participants**

The participants in our study were social media users who chose to follow our account, view, and engage with our video demonstrations. Inclusion criteria for our participants were those who have a cell phone or computer, internet access, and have an Instagram account to access the videos. Participants must have agreed to Instagram's terms and conditions in order to use the app or go onto the web browser. Participants also needed to be at least 18 years of age in order to be approved to be a follower on our private Instagram account. Exclusion criteria are those who are non-English speakers, as our consent form was in English.

### **Research Design**

Since we were posting our AAROM aquatic therapy modality videos onto a new Instagram page, we were starting from zero followers and needed to do some recruitment beforehand. A week prior to posting our videos onto our @aquatictherapyot account, we posted a flyer onto our personal Instagram accounts with details about our study, as a way to recruit participants. We attached a link to the flyer that led to the private account where they could then request to be a follower and a participant in our study. Once we received a notification of a request from an account, we sent them our consent form to



review. The consent form outlined our study and gave details about what it meant to be a participant. The consent form was also used as a way to ensure everyone was over 18 years old as it asked a question about age, as well as asking if they have a background in OT. Once they gave their consent and submitted the form, they were approved to be a follower and a participant in our study.

Through this observational study, we examined how the videos uploaded on our Instagram account were received by our followers. Based on the study by Wahid and Wadud (2020), we decided to post our videos to our Instagram account on Monday and Friday at 12pm Pacific Standard Time, in order to gain the most engagement on our posts. Each week we increased the level of promotion and adjusted the way we posted the videos by using different marketing strategies to then assess the engagement of each post. In the first week, we posted our aquatic unwinding video without using any promotional strategies, to see how the video would perform on its own. In week two, we posted our first WATSU® video using the hashtags #watsu, #aquatictherapy, #occupationaltherapy, #ot, and #aarom. By using these hashtags, our video would have been easily discoverable by our followers in the search bar simply by typing in one of the hashtags used. In week three, our second WATSU® video was posted using the same hashtags as in week two, since it was the same modality being used. The video posted in week three was also shared to our private Instagram story as well as on our own personal Instagram stories. We also included a link when sharing it to our personal Instagram stories which led to our thesis Instagram account. By combining both strategies of utilizing hashtags and sharing our video, our hope was to gain more potential followers and participants, thereby gaining more content engagement. After each video was posted,

we waited a week and then examined the number of views, likes, and comments it generated. At the end of the study, we compared each video's engagement to see if there was a difference between the various promotional strategies used.

### **Results**

When developing a hypothesis for how many participants we were hoping to recruit, we anticipated N=20. After a week of having posted our last video, our sample size ended with N=34 for our total followers on our private Instagram account. Additionally, we did have twelve follower requests after the end of our study, however we were not able to accept their follow request as they did not complete the consent form. Those potential participants are not included within these results. From our sample of participants, 27 of them (79.4%) were OT students and 7 of them (20.6%) had no background in OT. We were unable to recruit any OT practitioners for our sample.

The first day we posted our recruitment flyer, we gained the most followers, with a total of twelve and the day after we gained seven more followers. After sharing the recruitment flyer for the second time, we gained two more followers that day followed by two more the next day. Our first video that demonstrated the AAROM modality of aquatic unwinding was posted on Monday at 12pm and was only posted to our feed. This video was not shared, nor did it include any hashtags. After one week, this video received 39 views, 8 likes, and 0 comments. We gained six more followers after posting the first video. Our second video, which was the first WATSU® demonstration, utilized hashtags and was posted on Friday at 12pm in the same week as the first video. After a week of being posted, the video received 49 views, 15 likes and 0 comments. The third video that also demonstrated WATSU®, was posted the following Monday at 12pm, one week

from when the first video was posted. This video utilized the same hashtags as the first WATSU® video and was also shared on our private Instagram story and on our personal Instagram stories. There was a three-day-period between when the second and third videos were posted and within that timeframe, we gained one follower. This video received 53 views, 11 likes, and 0 comments after being posted for one week and in that time we gained our final three followers.

### **Discussion**

After analyzing the data, we were able to see some common themes such as when we got the most followers, which video got the most likes, and which one got the most views. The first time the flyer was shared on the researcher's stories, we gained our highest number of followers which was nineteen followers in 24 hours. When the flyer was shared for the second time, we only gained four more followers during the 24 hours. Throughout the study we would gain on average two followers per day, but that was dependent on when the pending follower read the message request that contained the consent form they had to fill out since we could not count them as followers without their submitted consent. This reveals that when something new is shown to the public they will take interest. The first post should be eye-catching and engaging because this is when the account may gain the most followers.

Despite having to use a private account, we were able to see that marketing strategies can have an impact on engagement levels. When posting our first video, we did not utilize any marketing strategies and noticed it had the least number of views and likes compared to the other weeks that utilized marketing strategies. This indicates that a post utilizing at least one marketing strategy may increase the engagement it receives by the

public. The second video that included only hashtags had the most likes. This finding was interesting because by using a private account, non-followers would not be able to discover our video under the hashtags we used. We cannot determine whether or not hashtags can lead to more likes. In addition, the increase in likes could be due to this video being published on a Friday. People may have had a day off from work or had more free time to use social media to catch up on the week. Lastly, the music could have had an impact on the amount of likes the post got. The results from week two show that it is helpful to have hashtags that people are familiar with and interested in because it may have encouraged them to like the post.

Our results revealed that the third video that included hashtags and was shared on the researchers' personal accounts had the most views. The increase in views can be attributed to the sharing of our video in three different ways, on the @aquatictherapyot's feed and story, and on the researchers' personal accounts, thereby providing repeated exposure to the post. By doing so, this also helped us gain three more followers that day, which could have contributed to an increase in views for that video.

For our research project our goal was to have the public and occupational therapists follow our @aquatictherapyot Instagram account. Our data showed that most of our participants were OT students, and the rest had no previous background in OT. This shows that those without a background in OT are interested in the profession and are willing to learn about it through social media. It is important to promote OT through social media to help inform others about the field and its niches. Although this was only limited to two weeks, we were able to gain more followers than expected in a short period of time. This supports the *AOTA Centennial Vision, Vision 2025*, and the

*Occupational Therapy Research Agenda* because it can increase the public's awareness of OT and help make it become a widely known profession. Using social media can help occupational therapists connect with other healthcare professionals from around the world, to share ideas, and gain more knowledge.

### **Limitations**

Due to the nature of social media and the Institutional Review Board process, our study faced multiple limitations as we were not able to use a public Instagram account. The results may not have been as representative as when using a public account. Instagram was the only platform we used for collecting data, which is a limitation because only Instagram users were able to view the videos. We used a private account that had no previous postings or followers which was imperative for avoiding bias, however, this made it difficult to share because gaining followers takes time. Another limitation that we faced because we used a private account is that we were not able to use the insights feature on Instagram. This feature provides a closer look at how content performs. It gives information about the number of accounts reached and the content interactions made from each post. Engagement refers to the number of views, likes, comments, shares, and saves gathered from each post. Since it is only offered as a tool for public Instagram accounts, we could not use this feature. Our private account also did not allow us to share stories and hashtags with the public, which led to limited engagement. Although our target audience was the general public, since our @aquatictherapyot account was private, we were only able to share the participant recruitment flyer on our personal Instagram accounts which is how we gained followers. This limited the type and

number of followers we were able to gain since the followers were people we already knew, making this a convenience sample.

For the followers to be accepted into our private Instagram account, they had to fill out a Google Form to give their consent to be part of the study. However, this became a limitation since many did not complete the form, and we were unable to accept their follow request. This could have been due to the participants not receiving a notification of our message that contained our Google Form. Additionally, since we were not following them, the Google Form went to their hidden message requests. Due to time constraints, we had to post three videos within a one-week time frame. If we had more time, we could have gained more followers and video engagement. An additional limitation of the timeframe was that it did not provide us enough time to recruit practitioners, which led to our thesis advisor being our demonstrator. To maintain privacy and confidentiality for our study, the private Instagram account was deleted. We will not see the potential likes, comments, and/or views of our posts since the data was gathered within a limited time frame.

### **Ethical and Legal Considerations**

In this research project, we created videos to demonstrate AAROM aquatic therapy modalities to post on Instagram. For the videos to be created, we needed to acknowledge the ethical and legal considerations of those involved. For demonstrators to qualify, they must have a minimum of 1000 hours practicing their modality and be certified. During the video recordings, the demonstrator and floaters had the right to stop the recording at any time if they were not comfortable. The floater was never left alone in the water and was always with the demonstrator to ensure their safety. No real client

sessions were recorded. For this research project, nobody under the age of eighteen was in the videos.

A participant recruitment flyer was shared on the researchers' personal Instagram accounts to share information regarding the research project. In the caption of each video, we provided details about the modality demonstrated. Consent was needed from each participant for them to be permitted to follow our private account. After reviewing the terms of use, we can verify that we are not in violation of any of Instagram's terms and policies. We were allowed to use Instagram for research purposes and can share our findings on the app if we so choose. We own all the rights to the video demonstrations we chose to upload to our account based on the terms and policies. There were not any financial costs involved for our participants, but they gave us their time. To keep consumers engaged, songs from Instagram's music library were added to the background of each video and followed copyright guidelines. Participants did not receive any financial compensation in return for their engagement, however they did receive knowledge about AAROM aquatic modalities and the field of OT. The only potential risk we identified for our participants was social media addiction. We made sure to follow social media platform guidelines to ensure the safety of our study participants. All data will remain stored in a password protected Google account that is only accessible to the researchers for up to three years following the study. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, demonstrator, and the floaters, the account was deleted after data collection.

### Conclusion

Social media is a beneficial tool occupational therapists can use to help promote their niche and advocate for the field. Social media platforms serve as an effective resource for communication among HCPs and as a way to educate others and share knowledge. In addition, we discovered that patients are using social media to find answers to health-related questions, for themselves and their families. A trend we noticed in our literature review was HCPs had an interest in increasing their social media use for research and as a tool to help educate others about their profession. With social media becoming a more prevalent tool within healthcare, the field of OT should take advantage of its benefits to expand their community, educate outsiders, and share new information with the online world. In addition, our results showed that utilizing at least one marketing strategy will help increase the engagement the public has with an Instagram post.

For future studies, we recommend increasing the duration of participant recruitment as well as using other social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, etc., to recruit more followers for an Instagram account. Next, we would recommend finding a way to add an “I agree” button prior to the video so that a public account can be used. We would recommend following the participants so that messages would be visible to them appearing in their hidden requests. The last recommendation is to categorize the age of the followers so one can see which age demographic has the most engagement with posts.

This study supports the *AOTA Centennial Vision, Vision 2025*, and the *Occupational Therapy Research Agenda* because our aim is to increase the public’s awareness of OT and help equip occupational therapists with a new skill set of using



social media marketing strategies effectively. The results from this study show that utilizing multiple marketing strategies garnered the most views on our Instagram videos. Additionally, we were able to reach others who do not have a background in OT which reveals that the “public” has an interest in learning about OT and its niches. We shared marketing strategies that occupational therapists can use when posting on their own social media accounts. If more occupational therapists were to promote OT, it would allow the public to have access to new information for understanding their own healthcare needs. This study can serve as an example of how occupational therapists can be active social media users to educate the public, advocate for themselves, the profession, and their niche to help the field of OT grow.

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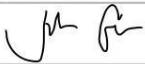
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**Appendix A**

**Institutional Review Board Approval**

Dear Dr. Annette Hatala and Students,

The Stanbridge University Institutional Review Board has completed the review of your application entitled "Promoting AAROM Aquatic Modalities in Occupational Therapy Through Social Media." Your application (MSOT011-506) is approved and categorized as Expedited.

IRB Application Number	MSOT011-506
Date	08/22/2022
Level of Review	Expedited
Application Approved	X
Conditional Approval	
Disapproved	
Comments	The requested Minor changes have been reviewed and confirmed as completed by the IRB. (08/22/2022)
Signature of IRB Chair	

Please note that any anticipated changes to this approved protocol requires submission of an IRB Modification application with IRB approval confirmed prior to their implementation.

Sincerely,  
 Julie Grace, M.S., M.A.  
 IRB Chair

## Appendix B

### Participant Consent Form

#### Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in being a participant in our study: Promoting AAROM Aquatic Modalities in Occupational Therapy through Social Media. We are students in the MSOT (Masters of Science in Occupational Therapy) program at Stanbridge University.

In this research study, we intend to learn which social media promotion strategies are effective, to show occupational therapists that using social media is a great tool to promote their niches, and help educate the public on active assistive range of motion (AAROM) aquatic modalities such as watsu, water dance, etc. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to view our weekly posting and engage by liking, commenting, and sharing them if you choose to. Additionally, you will be able to learn about different AAROM aquatic modalities such as watsu, water dance, etc.

As a participant, you will have the opportunity to engage with the videos we will post on our private Instagram page. We will be posting a total of 3 videos, each one minute in length over the span of 3 weeks (1 video per week). You can choose to engage by viewing, liking, commenting on, and/or sharing each video. You are not required to watch all videos nor engage with them, your participation is voluntary. A potential risk of participation is that due to this study taking place on social media one can be exposed to a social media addiction. You may choose to withdraw from this study at any point by unfollowing the account. Your decision to withdraw will not affect the results of this study. No personal information other than one's username will be shared. Only engagements (ie: comments) one makes on our specific posting may be shared in our thesis. However, no other personal identifiers will be shared or stored. There is also no cost to participate in this study.

To be included in this study, participants need to have an Instagram account, be a follower of our private account, and must be 18 years of age or older. Those excluded from this study are non-English speakers since all information will be provided in English.

If you have any questions please contact Dr. Annette Hatala (Thesis Advisor/ Co-Investigator) at [ahatala@stanbridge.edu](mailto:ahatala@stanbridge.edu) or Martha Herrera at [martha.herrera@my.stanbridge.edu](mailto:martha.herrera@my.stanbridge.edu) (Graduate Student Researcher). Lastly, please contact Stanbridge University's IRB department at [irb@stanbridge.edu](mailto:irb@stanbridge.edu) for any concerns you have about how this study is being conducted.

1. What is your Instagram username? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I may have asked \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

3. I verify that I am least 18 years or older \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can withdraw at any point \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

5. I give consent to use my username as data (if needed) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

6. Please mark all that apply \*

*Check all that apply.*

I am an occupational therapy practitioner

I am an occupational therapy student

No background in occupational therapy

7. I agree and give my consent to be a participant in this research study \*

*Mark only one oval.*

I agree

I disagree